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Message Text

SECRET

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10
ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 (ISO) W
---------- 085228
R 231335Z APR 74
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5870
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
CINCPAC
COMUSSAG

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5754

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y TEXT

DEPT PASS SECDEF, CJCS FOR INFO

E.O. 11652: XGDS
TAGS: MILI, CB
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MARSHAL LON NOL RE FANK SET-BACK AT
KOMPONG LUONG

REF: PHNOM PENH 5862

1. ACCOMPANIED BY GENERAL PALMER, I CALLED ON PRESIDENT LON NOL APRIL 23. PURPOSE OF VISIT WAS TO GIVE HIM OUR ASSESSMENT OF WHAT WENT WRONG AT KOMPONG LUONG AND TO OBTAIN HIS VIEWS ON WHAT HE INTENDS TO DO TO AVOID SIMILAR SETBACKS IN THE FUTURE.

2. I DEPLORED HIGH CASUALTIES FANK SUFFERED AT KOMPONG LUONG BUT ALSO POINTED OUT THAT CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS OF U.S. - PROVIDED MAP EQUIPMENT WERE LOST THERE. I EXPLAINED TO HIM AT LENGTH THE TIGHTNESS OF MAP FUNDS AND THAT UNLIKE PREVIOUS YEARS IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND FUNDS TO PAY FOR REPLACEMENTS OF HARDWARE LOST IN BATTLE. I EXPLAINED TO THE MARSHAL THE OVERWHELMING

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PERCENTAGE OF THIS YEAR'S MAP PROGRAM GOING FOR AMMUNITION

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AND THAT LITTLE WAS LEFT TO FINANCE REPLACEMENT OF HARD-
WARE. THEREFORE FANK MUST BE MUCH MORE ECONOMICAL AND
NOT SQUANDER THE PRECIOUS RESOURCES PLACED AT ITS
DISPOSAL BY THE U.S. AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE HIGH MATERIEL
LOSSES INCURRED AT KOMPONG LUONG, I CITED LOSS OF SIX
RIVER CRAFT WHICH IS EQUIVALENT TO ALL VESSELS LOST BY
THE KHMER NAVY SINCE 1970. I QUITE FRANKLY TOLD HIM I
HAD NO READY SOLUTION FOR REPLACING THESE CRAFTS EASILY.

3. I SAID THAT IT APPEARED TO US THAT ONE OF THE GREAT
SHORTCOMINGS OF THE KOMPONG LUONG DEBACLE WAS THE LACK
OF UNITY OF COMMAND DISPLAYED BY FANK. THERE WAS NO
ONE OFFICER IN CHARGE OF THE OVERALL OPERATION; EVERY
BRIGADE COMMANDER WAS IN CHARGE OF HIS OWN FORCES AND
NOBODY COULD GIVE ORDERS TO ALL THE MEN AT THE KOMPONG
LUONG ENCLAVE. FURTHERMORE, WE GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT
THE FANK OFFICERS IN KOMPONG LUONG HAD NOT BEEN PROPERLY
TASKED AND DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THEIR MISSION WAS.
THIS LACK OF PURPOSE AND URGENCY APPEARED TO HAVE PRE-
VAILED THROUGHOUT ENTIRE FOCE STRUCTURE IN KOMPONG LUOG.

4. REFERRING TO MY CONVERSATION WITH THE EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL LAST WEEK, I CITED THE KOMPONG LUONG SETBACK
AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE WHERE FANK FAILED TO SHOW AN
OFFENSIVE SPIRIT. AT KOMPONG LUONG, AFTER FANK TRIED
AND FAILED TO MOVE TOWARDS OUDONG, THE FRIENDLY TROOPS
MERELY SAT AROUND WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN.
EVEN IN THIS WAITING PROCESS THEY INCURRED SIGNIFICANT
CASUALTIES. I OPINED THAT FANK WOULD SUFFER FEWER
CASUALTIES WERE IT TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE AND SEARCH
OUT THE ENEMY THAN BY SITTING INENCLAVES AND WAITING
FOR THE ENEMY TO ATTACK.

5. I THEN SUGGESTED THAT THE ENEMY HAD CHANGED HIS
STRATEGY AND THAT THIS IN TURN REQUIRED A RE-EVALUATION
OF FANK'S TACTICS. I SAID THAT IT APPEARED TO US THAT
THE ENEMY WAS FOCUSSING ON PROVINCIAL TARGETS AND
THAT FANK DOESN'T HAVE THE MANPOWER TO DEFEND EVERY
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SINGLE TARGET ATTACKED BY THE ENEMY. ONE WAY TO BLUNT
THE ENEMY'S INITIATIVE WAS TO REINFORCE QUICKLY
THE ATTACKED POSITION, TO FIGHT MORE AGGRESSIVELY
INCURRING MORE CASUALTIES IF NECESSARY, AND ONCE THE
MILITARY SITUATION HAS BEEN STABILIZED, TO WITHDRAW
SOME INTERVENTION UNITS SO THAT THEY CAN BE UTILIZED
ELSEWHERE. DURING MY SHORT TENURE I NOTICED A TENDENCY
TO REINFORCE SLOWLY, IMOILIZING FOCES FOR TOO LONG

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THUS KEEPING INTERVENTION UNITS AT A SITE EVEN AFTER
THE MAIN ENEMY THRUST HAS SPENT ITSELF.

6. THE KOMPONG LUONG SETBACK ALSO HIGHLIGHTED ANOTHER
SERIOUS SHORTCOMING OF FANK. WHEN ASSEMBLING CASUALTY
DATA, WE COMPARED THE NUMBER OF MEN WHO ARRIVED AT LOVEK
WITH THE NUMBER OF MEN WE HAD BEEN TOLD PREVIOUSLY WERE
IN THE UNITS. IT WAS ONLY THEN THAT WE WERE TOLD OF
THE ABSENTEEISM AND ATTRITION THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN
THESE BRIGADES AND BATTALIONS AND THAT ACTUALLY THE
NUMBER OF MEN AT THE FRONT WAS LESS THAN THOSE REPORTED
PREVIOUSLY. TOO MANY SOLDIERS ARE ALLOWED TO LEAVE THEIR
UNITS AND FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO PHNOM PENH AND THEN
REMAIN AWOL EITHER UNTIL NEXT PAY DAY OR UNTIL ROUNDED
UP BY MILITARY POLICE. THIS LACK OF DISCIPLINE IN THE
UNITS AND FIELDING UNDERSTRENGTH UNITS IS ONE OF THE
REASONS OF FANK'S FAILURE IN THE FIELD AND MUST BE
REMEDIED.

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W
---------- 026812
R 231335Z APR 74
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5871
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
CINCPAC
COMUSSAG

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5754

EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECDEF, CJCS FOR INFO

7. I THEN CITED THE PREPARATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF
PREY VENG AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE MOBILITY IN FANK
FORCES WHICH IS NEEDED. I SAID THAT I HAD VISITED

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PREY VENG YESTERDAY AND THAT I WAS FAVORABLY IMPRESSED
BY THE DEFENSIVE PLANS DRAWN UP BY FANK NOW IT WAS
A QUESTION OF IMPLEMENTING THESE PLANS. I STRESSED
THE NEED TO GIVE THE PREY VENG COMMANDER FULL AUTHORITY
OVER ALL MILITARY UNITS PLACED UNDER HIS COMMAND. I
ALSO CALLED THE MARSHAL'S ATTENTION TO A DELAY IN MOVE-
MENT BY A COLUMN OF ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS (M-113),
ACCOMPANIED BY TWO BATTALIONS, WHICH WAS MAKING ITS WAY
TOWARD PREY VENG. SUCH DELAYS GIVE THE ENEMY A CHANCE
TO ATTACK THE REINFORCING UNITS COMING TO THE AID OF
PREY VENG.

8. IN CONCLUSION, I URGED THE MARSHAL TO HAVE THE
GENERAL STAFF FOCUS ON WHAT TOWNS AND WHAT AREAS FANK
WISHES TO DEFEND, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE LIMITED FORCES
AVAILABLE TO IT. FANK CANNOT BE EVERYWHERE AND IT MUST
GIVE PRIORITY TO SOME AREAS OVER OTHERS. IN THIS
CONNECTION I SPECIFICALLY ASKED HIM WHAT ARE HIS PLANS
FOR THE LOVEK AREA SLIGHTLY NORTHWEST OF THE UNFORTUNATE
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KOMPONG LUONG BEACHHEAD. DID HE INTEND TO EVACUATE
THE LARGE POPULATION TO THE AREA AROUND KOMPONG CHHNANG?
DID HE INTEND TO HANG ON TO LOVEK COMPLEX? IF
SO, FOR HOW LONG? WHAT ADDITIONAL FORCES DID HE
THINK HE COULD FIND FOR THIS DEFENSE?

9. GENERAL PALMER REINFORCED MY PRESENTATION BY
GIVING SPECIFIC ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF SOME OF THE
POINTS I MADE. IN THE COURSE OF OUR DISCUSSION WITH
THE MARSHAL, GENERAL PALMER RECEIVED WORD THAT THE THREE
COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THE THREE MAIN FANK UNITS AT LOVEK
HAD FLOWN OUT BY HELICOPTER TO PHNOM PENH. HE CITED THIS
AS AN INEXCUSABLE EXAMPLE OF POOR LEADERSHIP. EVEN IF
THESE COMMANDERS WERE CALLED BACK FOR A MEETING TO PHNOM
PENH, GENERAL PALMER SAID IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PREFERABLE
TO MEET WITH THE LOVEK DEFENDERS ON THE SPOT RATHER THAN
CALL THEM TO THE CAPITAL.

10. THE MARSHAL TOOK NOTES ON OUR PRESENTATION AND SAID
HE WOULD DISCUSS OUR EVALUATION WITH FANK COMMANDER-IN-
CHIEF GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ. REGARDING THE NEED
TO APPOINT ONE COMMANDER FOR EACH BATTLEFIELD HE CLAIMED
THAT THIS WAS GENERAL SOSTHENE'S RESPONSIBILITY BUT HE
AGREED ON THE PRINCIPLE. REGARDING THE NEED TO INCREASE
MOBILITY OF FANK INTERVENTION BRIGADES, HE CLAIMED THAT
THIS IS WHAT HE HAD IN MIND FOR KAMPOT. SPECIFICALLY,
ONCE THE MILITARY SITUATION HAD BEEN STABILIZED, HE
THOUGHT THAT THE DEFENSE OF KAMPOT SHOULD BE CONFIDED
TO THE 20TH BRIGADE AND OTHER INTERVENTION BRIGADES

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SHOULD BE RETURNED TO PHNOM PENH FOR REDEPLOYMENT.
AS FOR ROUNDING UP AWOLS IN PHNOM PENH, IT WAS NOT
CLEAR WHETHER HE WOULD FOLLOW-UP ON OUR SUGGESTION.
HE STRESSED HOWEVER THAT FLESHING OUT THE INTERVENTION
UNITS IS LINKED TO INCREASED RECRUITING AND TOWARDS
THAT END HE INFORMED US THAT A DECREE HAS BEEN PUBLISHED
PUTTING GENERAL SOSTHENE IN CHARGE OF MANPOWER MOBILI-
ZATION.

11. AS FOR THE FUTURE OF LOVEK, HE SAW IT AS A DEFENSIVE
AREA PROTECTING THE NORTHERN FLANK OF PHNOM PENH. HE
THEREFORE THOUGHT THAT LOVEK AND THE ADJACENT LARGE
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POPULATION CENTER SHOULD NOT BE ABANDONED BUT SHOULD
BE DEFENDED WITH FANK ESTABLISHING A BEACHHEAD ON THE
TONLE SAP RIVER TO FACILITATE RESUPPLY. HE ALSO SUGGESTED
THAT AN AIR FIELD BE BUILT AT LOVEK TO FACILITATE AIR
SUPPORT. FOR THE TIME BEING HE SAID THE 80TH BRIGADE
SHOULD STAY THERE BECAUSE SOME OF THE OTHER TROOPS HAVE
LOW MORALE AND THE DEPARTURE OF THE 80TH MIGHT HAVE
AN ADVERSE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT. HE ALSO PROMISED
TO LOOK INTO THE REASON FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE LOVEK
COMMANDERS TO PHNOM PENH THIS AFTERNOON.

12. FINALLY, THE MARSHAL ASKED GENERAL PALMER TO CHECK
WITH FANK WHETHER EMG IS DRAWING UP PLANS OF WHAT FANK
WISHES TO ACCOMPLISH DURING THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WITH
ITS AVAILABLE ASSETS. THROUGHOUT THIS 1 1/2 HOUR LONG
COVERNSATION IT BECAME APPARENT THAT THE MARSHAL HAD
PLACED HIS FAITH IN THE AMERICAN ABILITY TO HELP FANK
AND SOMEHOW THE U.S. WOULD MAKE EVERYTHING COME OUT
ALL RIGHT. WE SPENT A GOOD PART OF OUR MEETING POINTING
OUT TO HIM THAT OUR HELP IS LIMITED AND THAT I THE
FINAL ANALYSIS THE DECISIONS, EXECUTION AND ABOVE ALL THE
WILL TO FIGHT MUST COME FROM THE KHMERS.
DEAN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECDEF, CJCS.

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